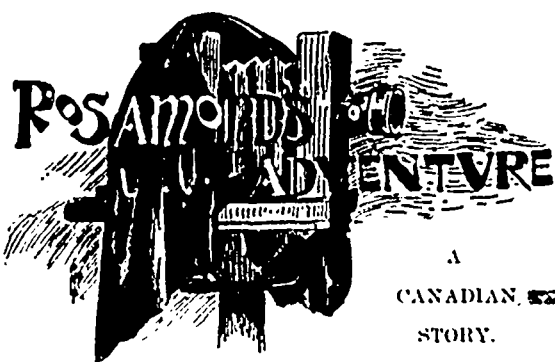




BY LILIAN CLAXTON.

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

"A THOUSAND pardons," he said. "I quite forgot that you might not be used to this style of travelling. Are you going far?" He looked at her as he spoke, out of a pair of merry brown eyes.

"To the white house."

"Oh," a slight look of surprise crossed his face.

Rosamond noticed it. "Can you tell me the name of the family living there?" she asked, not well knowing how else to start the conversation concerning this mysterious abode.

"Why, nobody lives there. At least," here the young man's lips began to twitch with suppressed amusement, "some people say there is someone living there."

"Oh," said Rosamond with a start, and an indescribable feeling of uneasiness. "Who?"

"An old man." The young fellow lowered his voice.

"What do you mean?" asked Rosamond, facing him with a nervous laugh.

"Why, the people say, Miss Ferrier, that it is haunted. I will tell you all about it some day."

The last curious remark would have made more impression upon Rosamond, had she not been so engrossed in the former part of the sentence, and the thought of her unknown correspondent, still she raised her eyes in some surprise to his face.

"Oh, we are bound to meet again, Miss Ferrier. I have often heard of you from the people round about. I made the acquaintance of your cousin the other day. Probably you have not heard of me, though. I am Ned Vanstone at your service. My family, in a desire for rural solitude, have taken up some land and a house at Eganville, about seven miles from Calanoozie. A more desolate spot you never saw. My father is in despair over the rocks and stumps, so I have given up my newspaper reporting, and have run down to help him for a while. Here we are at your Manorial Hall," and Mr. Edward Vanstone jumped down and held out his hand to Miss Ferrier.

A small gate beneath a bowee of woodbine, opened upon a narrow grassgrown path leading to a quaint white house. It had low windows round which tangled vines were straying, and waving idly to and fro in the western wind. There was an air of sad desolation about the place. The eastern portion of the house was almost overshadowed by a large cypress; somehow the meaning of the funeral tree crept into Rosamond's mind—decay—death. What scenes had it looked upon! Had girlish faces ever smiled beneath that house-tree? Had little feet grown towards manhood beneath its shadow? Rosamond gave a shiver and turned towards her companion, young and strong, and full of life and laughter. He was gathering up the reins preparatory to driving on.

"Why, you are not afraid?" he asked. His tone was half incredulous, half amused, kindly withal.

Rosamond drew herself up. "Of course not," she returned, rather haughtily. "Thank you for my ride," and she opened the gate and walked through, while the wagon and its owner drove off, she could hear him singing as he went.

Rosamond walked to and fro for a few minutes, studying the house from different points of view. Then with a desire to create some sign of life about the place, she shook off her nervous fears, and tried to open the windows, but though they shook in their sockets, she could not force them up from the outside, and the door was chained, and padlocked. She peered through the dusty panes. The spiders were idly spinning long webs from the ceilings, and the big blue bottles went buzzing round. She went back to the camera, and took a photo of the side of the house, facing Lonerock Mountain. She could take but one photo at a time, having injured her plate holder, so that it would only hold one plate. This necessitated three journeys to the white house. She had discarded the Ferrottype process to which she treated the Calanoozie folk, and was using dry plates for her views.

When she had taken the photograph she wended her way back to Calanoozie, while the sun went down behind the mountain. She developed her plate that night, and then retired to rest, but only to re-visit the weird little house in her dreams, and to fancy she heard the voice of her unknown correspondent calling to her from within, while she stood outside, the locked door between them.

The next evening Rosamond decided to take the front view. If the photos were to be finished in a week, she would have to make all possible haste. Mr. Vanstone and his springless wagon came rattling along the road again. "It is a good thing that this is the last of the evening journeys," thought Rosamond, "to-morrow morning I will take the third view." However, the photo taken that evening turned out a failure, so Rosamond had two more journeys in store.

The next day dawned gloriously. It was cooler than its predecessors, and she set blithely out in the early morning, rather enjoying the change in her professional labors. To her surprise, at the corner of the road by the schoolhouse, who should appear in sight but Mr. Ned Vanstone, walking this time. He seemed equally surprised to see her.

"I had some business with Mr. Miller at the post office," he said, "and stayed the night there. What a pity I haven't the cart with me! That is such a heavy thing to carry."

"Oh, it is cooler to-day, so I do not mind."

"Well, time hangs heavy on my hands this morning, I am not going back to Eganville for a day or two, so let me carry it for you, do," and he took it from her, regardless of her demur.

"You seem very much taken up with that white house," said young Vanstone suddenly, as they walked along together. He looked at her with some curiosity as he spoke.

"I am interested in it," returned Rosamond cautiously.

"Will you be going again after this morning?"

"Yes—once more."

"To-morrow evening? Yes, go then, and let me drive you, may I?"

Rosamond hesitated, she was beginning to feel doubtful as to how far her friendship with her new acquaintance should extend.

"Oh, say yes. When do you start, and may I call at the Stopping House for you? Or perhaps you would rather I did not do that?"

Rosamond laid her doubts to rest.

"That is where I am staying, and there is no mystery about it, is there?" she said in her straightforward manner. "Yes, come about seven o'clock, if you are sure it will not be out of your way, and thank you for offering."

Ned Vanstone left Rosamond at the gate, and

went on down the road singing Lady Nairne's Scotch song as he went. She could catch the words distinctly; they floated back to her at a later day:

"The auld haurd, the auld haurd,
Sae canty, kind and crouse,
How mony did he welcome
To his ain wee dear auld house!
The auld house, the auld house,
Wherever I may be,
There ne'er can be a new house
Will seem so dear to me."

But a little further down the road, when Rosamond Ferrier was out of hearing, he changed the song suddenly:

"So long as the nation endureth,
So long as it's flag is unfurled,
I'll love her forever and ever,
O, sweet little Rose of the World!"

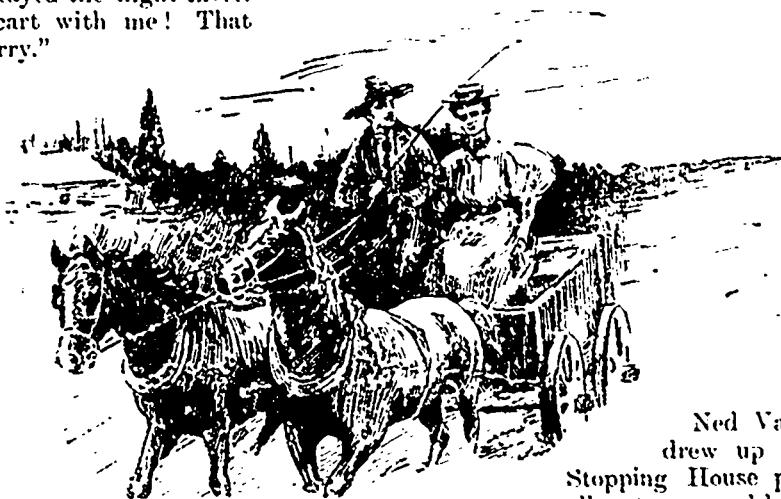
CHAPTER II.

There was a change in "the auld house" that evening. Rosamond looked up from her focussing on the ground glass, and noticed it. Wonder of wonders! All the upper windows were open. Someone was either inside or had been in. Was the mystery to be solved? Surely the hand that opened those windows must have had something to do with the strange note lying in her pocket. She stole cautiously up to the house, under the shadow of the cypress, and peeped in through a window. Packing cases! Someone was about to move in, then. What man of education could have chosen the neighborhood of Calanoozie for a dwelling place? And what a diffident personage not to have signed his name to his note!

Rosamond took the view and returned to breakfast at the Stopping House. She was late for the meal, the others had finished, voices floated through the open kitchen door to her.

"So the new minister will be here on Tuesday they say. Just fancy his setting up 'bachelor's hall' in the old white house, instead of boarding at Mrs. McMullen's like all the others have done."

"Bah!" said Rosamond, "all the romance has gone out of the affair. It is only the new minister after all."



Ned Vanstone drew up at the Stopping House punctually at seven o'clock the

following evening, and Rosamond and the camera climbed up together. There was a spice of naughtiness about this excursion which certainly gave zest to it. Rosamond was not at all sure as to what her mother's feelings would have been, had she seen her seated on that high perch beside that pleasant, brown-eyed young man, driving through the balmy evening air. As for Rosamond herself she felt as though she had known Ned Vanstone for years.

"Do you know that the new minister is going to live in the old white house?" she asked.

"What, Thorndale? I knew he was coming here to minister to the spiritual wants of Calanoozie, poor chap! but I didn't know he was going to put up there. I met him once, he is not a bad sort of fellow, only rather juvenile for his calling."

(To be Continued.)